

University of Wales Trinity St David

International Business Communications

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Assessment 1

Individual Report

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Table of contents

Introduction.....	3
United Kingdom culture and their business communication stile	3
John Lewis Partnership description of the company and organisation culture	4
Hofstede and Samovar’s theories in the United Kingdom context	5
Cultural sensitivity in a diversity workplace.....	7
Communication barriers in a workplace.....	8
Recommendations.....	9
Conclusion	10
References.....	11

Introduction

This report will be all about culture and communication within the international business organisation.

In this report, I will analyse different business communication situations which can create a positive or a negative impact on the organizational environment.

The company that I have chosen for the case study is the “John Lewis Partnership,” they are a notable example of how to create and maintain a positive ambiance between employees from different countries with diverse cultures.

I will provide the application of Hofstede and Samovar’s theories and will demonstrate the “line manager” importance of inclusiveness in the workplace.

Due to diversity of different workers from diverse cultures in this report, I will discuss about cultural sensitivity and the importance of being culturally sensitive. I will provide some practical examples of the different communication barriers in the UK organisation context.

United Kingdom culture and their business communication style

In the globalization century, the United Kingdom, represents one of the largest and most ambitious places in the world for doing business with diplomacy. British people are very polite, have social etiquette and treat others with respect.

Language, accent, and vocabulary have differences and depend on regions, such as a lot of people nowadays still know Welsh (Childs, 2016 p.23).

Also, “teatime” is one of the famous traditions in the UK which also contribute to face-to-face effective communication. Humour is an integral part of the conversation they are using it in communication to be more direct and pointed.

Furthermore, the United Kingdom with the increasing migration become a multinational place with so many diversities cultures and due to these cultures have modified and introduced new traditions and is still visible diversity in the UK such as a variety of foods and worship. Evason (2021)

British people arrive always on time, they do not like when somebody is late, so punctuality plays a significant role in business and in their culture.

Organisations are focusing more on flat organizational structure, and as usual have clear communication for efficiency, decisions are made by the democratic process where employees promote work-life balance (Bailey, 2015).

John Lewis Partnership description of the company and organisation culture

John Lewis is one of the top retail brands in the United Kingdom nowadays with around 80.800 employees/ partners. (John Lewis Partnership, 2023)

John Lewis company was founded in 1864, the founder John Spedan Lewis started the business as an experiment into a better method of conducting business by involving the employees in choosing how the company would be conducted. As we can see in the illustration below even in the 20-century building trust and having the right communication with everyone played a crucial role in developing a successful company.

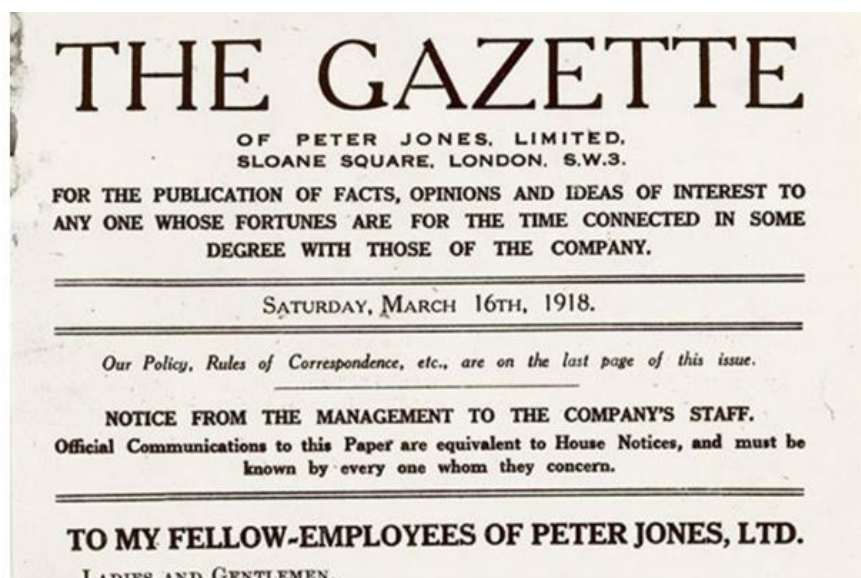


Illustration 1. The first copy of the weekly in-house magazine

Source: (John Lewis Partnership)

The partnership is distinctive in that its staff members own it. As a result, everyone in the partnership is motivated to do a lot of effort to ensure the success of the business also, has a strong sense of social responsibility.

John Lewis company is a great illustration of a business that is operating ethically. It is a successful company that treats both its customers and partners/ employees fairly.

Hofstede and Samovar's theories in the United Kingdom context

Hofstede and Samovar's theories represent a great framework for analysing multicultural communication. Hofstede's six cultural dimensions describe 6 indexes and provide a score for them, so analysing these scores as a result we will get a clear understanding of cultural differences between countries. (Deresky, 2013 p.118)

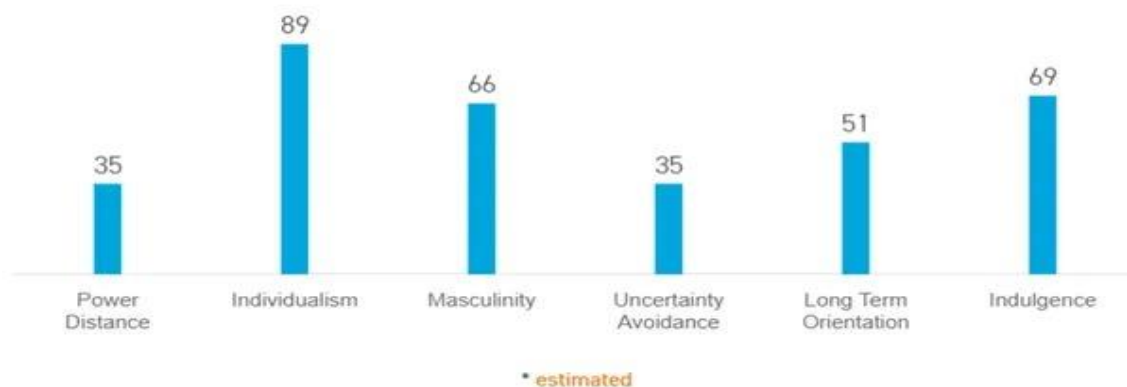


Fig.1 Hofstede's 6 six cultural dimensions in the UK context

Source: (Hofstede-insights, 2023)

In this illustration can see all Hofstede indexes scores in correlation with UK culture, for example power distance – is the first index and has scored with 35 which is a low score, and it shows how employees accept or do not accept power from the authority and the level of respect for them. In the UK people are oriented to minimize inequality so the number of women employees has increased considerably, since 2010, also creating an inclusive environment and support for all genders. As a result, efforts to reduce inequality have had an impact on many societal levels but in the workplace the growth can be seen more in a flat organisational structure. People working for UK-based companies typically expect to be able to contact supervisors easily and just by their first name. So, in the UK employees feel free to express their opinion or disagreement in front of their managers, where all have the equal power.

In any organization, leadership has a crucial function to play, but for Chinese people authority has much more importance, they promote respect and work in harmony and will never express opinions in front of their seniors. This suggests that managers must communicate with employees as individuals, not only as representatives of the positions they hold but also, they should take into consideration people from other cultures like Chinese culture and slowly increase trust that it is normal to contact.

In a country with a low power index, the individualism index always will be high, and it demonstrates how people prioritize their self and needs. In the UK this index is scored 89 so people prioritize personal freedom and family value, they do not stay at work more than is necessary, also they promote individual rights and achievement. As a result, for John Lewis company high individualism means more individual initiatives, better communication between managers and employees and faster decision making. In addition, manager should pay attention to employees who promote collectivism, that believe in the value of collectivism such as China and Pakistan it will be difficult to adopt to an individualistic environment. So, as a result creating an inclusiveness workplace for all employees is the answer.

According to Hofstede's analysis masculinity index in the UK is oriented more for men's achievement than women's with a 66 score and meaning that women are less involved in work and more in family growth. However, the UK's society places less emphasis on important characteristics of nurturing, such as having a good relationship with one another, modesty, and quality of life. People have a high value on career advancement and are extremely ambitious. For example, John Lewis offers support for female participation in the workforce and growth despite childcare.

Samovar's theory requires mention especially intercultural communication concept which represents the ability of people to communicate and interact with people from diverse cultures. (Samovar et. al. 2015 p.17)

Intercultural communication can be a challenge for John Lewis company because it works with so many employees from different culture which have different views of thinking and understanding and are influenced by their own culture which leads to miss communication. For example, what British employee understand as a right in Brazilian culture can offend them if British people use sarcasm and make a negative comment about Brazilian culture it will offend Brazil's people. So, managers should provide comprehensive training to the employees regarding rules and regulation of internal organisational culture. John

Lewis promotes fairness, respect and creates an inclusive environment for all “We put everything we have into everything we do, earning the loyalty and trust that we need to be successful.” (John Lewis Company)

Cultural sensitivity in a diversity workplace

A successful business is open to collaboration, inventive, and creative. To be most successful in these three areas, you should emphasise the value of inclusivity and cultural sensitivity. John Lewis company develops and maintains all these aspects throughout its activities due to the right rules and regulations that the company has made through many years and building a strong relationship between employees. However, so many different people are working together in every day, such as people with different genders, religions, or people from different countries and people with disabilities that have so different norms and values, so in this way it is essential to create a safe work environment and develop cultural ethics and sensitivity. (John Lewis inclusion, 2023)

First, the manager should make sure that the working environment is comfortable for all employees because as I said before, people understanding, and their behaviours depend on their own culture which is different from country to country. Second, the manager should provide comprehensive training to the employees regarding cultural sensitivity to understand the company's norms and values regarding diverse cultures.

For example, in the UK people do not consider it rude to interrupt someone in a conversation or use humour or direct eye contact while in China or Pakistan, it might be considered disrespectful, and it also might insult them.

This aspect can lead to less engagement and cooperation between employees because of their own culture which also leads to cultural barriers.

Pakistan is an Islamic republic, so people from this culture are supposed to pray a couple of times every day while British, or Polish, people have other religions and they do not do the same.

Due to this aspect, they should treat Muslims with respect even if their religion is different from others and of course according to Pakistan's people this time per working day. Evason (2021)

Another important aspect needed to be mentioned is adaptability which as a result will create more inclusiveness between employees, when people are sensitive and

can adapt their own culture and beliefs to other cultures to not lose face but shows respect for this culture indeed can create an equitable workplace.

Communication barriers in a workplace

Problems with communicating in cross-cultural partnerships it must be emphasised that cultural diversity can conduct communication to misunderstand issues and are limiting professional communication in organizations.

In an intercultural organization like John Lewis, communication barriers can create a very tense environment between employees. Due to these barriers create misunderstanding and can create a difficulty to do business right. Also, communication and language barriers can lead to delay and dispute because every culture have diverse ways of understanding and perception for example the same message UK employee understand differently from Chinese. (Bailey, 2015 p.100).

The first, cultural variable that can affect communication are attributes for example manager tells employees that they have done an excellent job, so from a Chinese perspective this message communicates that it was good but will need to improve their skills at the same time for British employee the same message is understanding differently according to their culture, attributions, and experiences.

Another barrier that needs to be mentioned is the emotional barrier and behaviour of people's style, though, is a feature of the communication itself. The communicator and the addressee are the sources of style determination. An example can be how the manager communicates with employees in a stressful situation or when he is angry and uses a gesture to express his disappointment because employees do not put and arrange the products in time, it can be difficult to explain and communicate clearly. Finally, it is indicated that the impact on the workers will be divided differently between employees, such as Chinese employee will agree with outrage and because of their cultures respect for the authority will try his best without saying something, in term of the British employee will express his opinion regarding to that situation.

Trust represents a particularly important variable in organisational communications and therefore collaboration and growth between managers and employees also, a strong relationship is building on trust. This awareness offers many advantages in the workplace, including motivating communicators to ignore cultural differences, creating a more positive and productive organisational environment, and reducing difficulties that can appear. People from India prefer to do business based on trust and respect, so if an Indian

manager does not have the trust of the employees, he will never engage them in a decision-making process or delegate important tasks.

Power distance can be one index that can affect trust between manager and employees because countries with a lower power index such as China and Brazil. They prefer to be led and respect the authority in such a way that they find it difficult to interact with someone who has a higher level in the company.

Also, in the same way if the company does not show trust in the employees, they may be less motivated to work harder with dedication.

Attitudes represent another cultural variable that can affect communication for example stereotyping in the case of John Lewis company can be encountered because are working people with disabilities so for another cultural perception an employee with a disability may be stereotyped as being not responsible for the task and helpless more than others. So, it is important to be aware of stereotypes and treat all employees equally because this aspect very often causes misunderstanding in intercultural communication. (Deresky, 2013 p.153-159)

Recommendations

In order to keep out any background noise that can interfere with international communication, first of all should try to learn about diverse cultures and cultivate cultural sensitivity as much as possible for all cultures met at the workplace.

The management team can contribute to a positive workplace culture and climate by trying to learn about new employees' cultures and provide support for all employees at the same equally.

Moreover, by prioritising fairness and inclusion the manager can help make the workplace more culturally receptive and friendly ambiance in the company.

Creating a new job position with flexible working hours for people with disabilities will increase the trust in the company. Whether interacting with coworkers, be kind and open and remember to give everyone a chance to speak and does not meter what position employees have in the company.

Organising events for employee engagement and celebrating cultural differences to develop and maintain a strong relationship between them.

In a company as large as John Lewis, where diversities of people are working every day, managers should organise happy hour events or for example engaging

events where employees present something that represents their own culture, such as foods, clothes, songs, etc.

Manager should promote the activities and encourage employees to participate. These kinds of activities are very funny, and at the same time are developing cultural sensitivity and creating relationship between employees, which in the future will bring motivation and job satisfaction.

Furthermore, company can provide learning and development opportunities for employees, manager should offer help and opportunities to grow and organise workshops and courses.

Conclusion

A major conclusion of this report is that communication has a vital role in the organisations and has a direct impact on employees. Also, culture represents a key element that is responsible for the conduct of people's behaviour.

This assessment focuses on a systematic understanding of John Lewis company in the United Kingdom and the importance of being culturally sensitive with other employees in the company.

This work helps to analyse the communication barriers in the diverse organizational workplace and demonstrate the cultural differences through the support of examples. Used Hofstede's cultural dimensions to compare the culture of the UK and other countries and Samovar's theory to understand the importance of communication between cultures.

Implementing cultural diversity workshop activities and organising engaging events for employees can lead to effective communication, create great relationships, and increase the productivity of the company.

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